

Andree Greenberg - Restoration succeeding at Napa Plant salt ponds

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Subject: Restoration succeeding at Napa Plant salt ponds

Here is an update in the [Napa Valley Register on the restoration to tidal marsh of the Napa Plant](#), a retired salt pond crystallizer site which Cargill owned until 2003 that is nearly identical in size and configuration to the Redwood City salt ponds that are proposed for development.

Within months, the waters of the Napa River will once again flood historical wetland areas that had been diked since the 1850s, first for oat hay farming and cattle ranching and later for salt production. This will allow the re-establishment of wetlands on former salt ponds to support populations of fish, birds, crustaceans and other wildlife.

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AmCan marshland restoration succeeding

By KERANA TODOROV, Register Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, July 5, 2010 11:26 am

A group associated with duck hunting is helping to restore thousands of acres of former marshlands with the help of federal stimulus money - and so far the operation is succeeding.

The restoration of former salt ponds back to marshlands north of American Canyon should be completed by the end of the year, according to Ducks Unlimited, the nonprofit organization that oversees the project for the California Department of Fish and Game. Ducks Unlimited is not just a sporting club, it also touts itself as a world leader in wetlands restoration.

The American Canyon restoration project, estimated at \$13.4 million, entails the restoration of the 1,400-acre south Napa County site the state Department of Fish and Game has owned since 2003. Over the next few months, amphibious excavators will get to work, equipped with GPS equipment to spot mapped historical sloughs. Over the past two years, levees have been breached gradually to re-establish historical tidal flows that had disappeared over the decades. In August, the main levee is scheduled to be breached.

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Tom Huffman, wildlife supervisor for the Department of Fish and Game, said the changes will be subtle, altering the landscape over a period of years as sediment moves into the site with tidal flows through slough channels. But with time, the marshes will be restored.

"The Napa River hasn't forgotten the areas that it used to occupy," Huffman said.

The wetlands restoration not only benefits waterfowl and shorebirds, but also salmon, Mark Biddlecomb, director of conservation programs for Ducks Unlimited, wrote in an e-mail. Juvenile salmon feed and seek protection from predators in tidal wetlands.

"When such habitat is available, juvenile salmon (populations) are generally larger and more robust and better able to survive to adulthood," Biddlecomb said.

Two engineers for Ducks Unlimited, Steven Carroll and Russ Lowgren, explained the restoration was designed to allow tidal waters to flow in and out of the area like any healthy marshland. One goal was to make sure the tidal waters neither eroded the old levees restored for flood control nor settled on the former salt ponds with no way out.

Construction began in June 2008, largely funded thanks to \$8.5 million in federal stimulus funds from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. So far, almost 400 acres have been flooded. The last segment, where most of the construction crews are working this year, includes more than 1,000 acres, where white salt bars remain visible in spite of the rain waters that remain in the ponds.

Jane Lubchenko, undersecretary for oceans and commerce and administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, has visited the site, also known as the Napa Plant Site Restoration Project.

A representative for Lubchenko in Washington, D.C., could not be reached for comment by press time. But a spokesman for Ducks Unlimited, said Lubchenko's

visit was a chance for his organization to show the administrator "what a great partnership we have going with NOAA."

Carroll, the regional engineer for Ducks Unlimited, said the federal stimulus funds from NOAA have allowed the project to proceed. The money is being spent primarily on restoration of the last 1,000 acres.

Eventually, once the construction is completed, Fish and Game will allow public access to the site. A parking lot has been built, along with restrooms. Amenities for the general public will also include a kayak and boat launch on the Napa River.

The Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District plans to build a trail between American Canyon and Napa. A segment is planned to follow Fish and Game-owned levees that are being restored to withstand tidal flows.

The last of Cargill's salt-production equipment, including conveyor belts, will be removed, according to the Minneapolis-based company.

Engineers and biologists have observed egrets, pelicans and nesting American Avocets. Other birds included Black-Necked Stilts and Western Sandpipers.

To protect the bird populations and encourage them to nest at the site, three islands have been built. Although they look like sandbars now, eventually they will be slightly elevated areas designed to stay above the tidal flows.

Each island has been covered with different materials to encourage nesting, including oyster shells from Point Reyes. In a sign the restoration project is working, state biologists say federally protected California Least Terns have built dozens of nests on the island covered with oyster shells.